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Small-Scale Agriculture Today

Office for Small-Scale Agriculture



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U.S. Department of Agriculture - Cooperative State Research Service - Agricultural Research For A Better Tomorrow

AT ISSUE...RURAL ROOTS

I think it is interesting that those city people who can afford it will often have a country place, a retreat, or a quiet place with neighbors and a sense of real community. Economists argue that the law of large numbers will dominate and sooner or later these smaller rural places will be consumed by the bigger cities. These economic laws conflict with our natural passion to be able to avoid the unnatural conditions caused by too many people in too small a space.

There are other compelling reasons why these rural places should not be driven to extinction by economic forces.

While we have seen enormous concentrations take place in commercial agriculture and a corresponding decline in farm jobs and smalltown agribusinesses, there are still nearly 2 million families who live on small part-time farms and work off the farm to bring the family additional income. Add to that many millions more, either employed or retired, who have chosen to live in a nonfarm rural area. Millions of people living in the cities have rural roots, and surveys show that many of them would move "home" if they could find a job there.

While the proceeds from the sale of produce from these small part-time farms don't compare with proceeds from the sale of commercial giants like cattle, corn, or cotton, they are important to those involved. In fact, the public is demanding that more field-ripened fruits and vegetables be produced locally. Sustainable organic farming techniques are always improving, enabling a new family-based industry to arise in some areas.

Rural development describes organized community attempts to overcome the law of large numbers. We've learned that development starts at home or it doesn't start at all. Once a community decides to do something about local circumstances we find it is best to build on existing industry within the community or to build new industry around local natural resources. We have proven a community doesn't have to be big to be attractive.

New high-speed telecommunications are transforming rural places; we are now able to overcome the cost of transferring

information at the speed of light (fiber optics). Many businesses can now locate in rural areas because modern electronics allow them to come to places where people prefer to live.

This same technology brings learning to rural schools and skilled diagnostic services to rural health facilities.

In short, rural places now have a chance to be that "best of all worlds." (Comments of Bob Bergland, former Secretary of Agriculture, January 1992)

TOPICS AND TECHNOLOGY

Specialty Potatoes - This is the latest factsheet in the series "A Small-Scale Agriculture Alternative" from the USDA Office for Small-Scale Agriculture. Free, the publication lists several sources of information on cultural practices, harvesting and storage, marketing, varieties, etc. Contact: Bud Kerr, USDA-CSRS, OSSA, Suite 342, Aerospace Building, Washington, DC 20250-2200; telephone 202-401-4640, Fax 202-401-5179.

Asparagus - The proceedings of the 1992 Ohio Asparagus School are now available for \$7 each. Contact: Carl Cantaluppi (make check payable to The Ohio State University), OSU-Piketon Research and Extension Center, 1864 Shyville Road, Piketon, OH 45661; telephone 614-289-2071, Fax 614-289-4591.

Reference - "Designing Facilities for Pesticide and Fertilizer Containment" costs \$15. It is a compilation of the best available information for storing, handling, and using agricultural pesticides and fertilizers. The 116-page book is "intended to be a desk reference that provides recommendations based on accepted engineering principals and practices." Contact: Northeast Regional Agricultural Engineering Service (NRAES) Cooperative Extension, 152 Riley-Robb Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853-5701; telephone 607-255-7654.

Milk Consumption - "On a per capita basis, Americans went from consuming 214 pounds of whole milk in 1970 to only 88 pounds in 1990. Skim milk increased from 12 to 23 pounds,

and low-fat shot up from 30 to 98 pounds in 20 years." (The Washington Post, February 19, 1992, p. E5)

"Growing Great Garlic" - "The first garlic book ever written specifically for organic gardeners and small farmers." For more details send S.A.S.E.. Contact: Ron L. Engeland, Route 1, Box 162, Okanogan, WA 98840; telephone 509-422-6940.

New - For more information about diversified farm enterprises, order the ADAPT 3 proceedings book. Send \$12.95 to Successful Farming, ADAPT 3 Book, 1716 Locust Street, Des Moines, IA 50309-3023; telephone 515-284-2852.

Free - The agricultural book catalog, 88 pages, lists books and describes how to use the agAccess Research and Information Service. Contact: Jeffrey Harpin, agAccess, 603 Fourth St, Davis, CA 95616; telephone 916-756-7177.

Silage and Hay - Forage preservation is vital to livestock producers. A 53-page guide, "Silage and Hay Preservation" costs \$6. Contact: Northeast Regional Agricultural Engineering Service (NRAES), 152 Riley-Robb Hall, Cooperative Extension, Ithaca, NY 14853-5701; telephone (607) 255-7654.

Farmers - A videotape of news reports featuring some of the beginner and retired farmers who have benefitted from the Center for Rural Affairs (CFRA) Land Link project is now available for \$20 per tape. Contact: CFRA, Box 406, Walthill, NE 68067.

Planting Potatoes? - Cut seed is widely used, but whole seed is less sensitive to tuber decay. Cut seed pieces should be firm and weigh 2 to 2 1/2 ounces, and with at least one eye.

Spraying Insecticide - Bear in mind that many insecticides are fatal to honey bees; so if you use insecticides, apply them in the evening after the bees have quit work!

Farmland - The USDA estimates that 2.95 million people and organizations own 833 million acres of private farmland. But only 4 percent of the owners -- approximately 124,000 -- hold nearly half the acreage.

Just Write - Copies of North Dakota's Marketplace 92 program booklet, the third annual Small Business, Community Renewal and Ag. Diversification Conference are available. Contact: Senator Kent Conrad's Office, 220 East Rosser Ave, Bismarck, ND 58501; telephone 701-258-4648.

25th Anniversary - Attention: all past apprentices, students, staff, and friends of the University of California - Santa Cruz (UCSC) Farm and Garden; 3-day reunion and symposium July 25-27, 1992. Contact: Beth Benjamin, P.O. Box 178, Boulder Creek, CA 95006; telephone 408-338-4268.

Audiotapes - For a listing of recordings taken at the 1992 National Farmer's Direct Marketing Conference; send a S.A.S.E. to Marie Follick, 1401 S. Madison, Normal, IL 61761; telephone 309-452-9073.

Tip - Many taxpayers don't realize that interest income from U.S. Treasury bills, notes and bonds is tax-free at the State and local level.

Farmer-To-Farmer - "Strategies for Sustainable Agriculture" is a six-segment video series covering field crops, rotational grazing, vegetables, IPM for vegetables and small fruits, IPM for apples, and high-value marketing. Each videotape is \$29.95; a complete series is \$149.95. Contact: Robert Rooy, Farm Videos, 7407 Hilltop Drive, Frederick, MD 21702; telephone 301-473-8797, Fax 301-473-8695.

Big, Big, BIG - The World Pumpkin Confederation announced the winners of the World Weigh-offs on October 14, 1991. Winners of the biggest or largest were:

- Ray & Ayo Waterman, Collins, NE: pumpkin, 780.5 pounds
- Alan Nesbitt, Conesus, NY: squash, 733.0 pounds
- Ivan & Lloyd Bright, Hope, AR: watermelon 229.5 pounds

Leafy Greens Council - Green growers, packers, and shippers nationwide should seriously consider becoming a member of this important promotional organization. It is in your own best interest. Contact: Ray Clark, Leafy Greens Council, P.O. Box 76067, St. Paul, MN 55175; telephone 612-222-3232.

Did You Know - Annual morning glory is a native weed of North America and a close cousin to field bindweed. The roots can go down in the ground more than 6.5 feet and the seeds can lie dormant in the soil for 30 years and still germinate.

Farm Income - "The USDA projects national net farm income at \$44 billion for 1991, down from 1990's record \$50.8 billion. In 1992, it predicts net farm income could drop further, perhaps as low as \$40 billion." (The Washington Post, December 29, 1991 p. A1)

Apprenticeship - The Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA) is providing a farm apprenticeship program to help people who wish to learn organic farming skills in exchange for room, board, and farming knowledge. Contact: Kamyar Enshayan, Dept. of Entomology, OEFFA, 1735 Neil Ave., Columbus, OH 43210; telephone 614-292-3786.

Numbers - "The 1987 agriculture census counted 23,000 black farmers, down from a historical high of 926,000 in 1920. For white farmers, the decline was not nearly as steep -- from 5.96 million at their peak in 1935 to 2.04 million in 1987." (The Washington Times, October 8, 1991, p. A6)

Drought and Trees - Particularly young or recently planted trees need special care. Drill a pattern of small holes 15-18 inches deep and 24 inches apart in the ground above the tree roots. Water slowly and at length so the area is gradually soaked. Once a week is adequate unless newly transplanted.

New - The 387-page book "Food from Dryland Gardens" is an ecological, nutritional, and social approach to small-scale

household food production in the industrial and Third Worlds, and costs \$27.50, check payable to Center for People, Food and Environment. Contact: David Cleveland, CPFE, 344 South Third Avenue, Tucson, AZ 85701; telephone 602-624-5379.

Tip - Please give all small game a BRAKE!

Sourcebook for Ideas - Several thousand publications on approximately 100 topics have been accumulated in a 34-page new publication, "Innovative Rural Enterprises." The cost is \$3 and includes postage and handling. Contact: Debra Britton, Ohio State University, Dept. Ag. Econ., 2120 Fyffe Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1099; telephone 614-292-6924.

Tip - If hard water causes mineral scale buildup on working parts of equipment it can usually be removed by a brief soak in vinegar.

Barley, Hops, and Yeast - The American Homebrewers Association (AHA) brings homebrew enthusiasts together in the pursuit of information on beer, brewers, and beermaking. For more information contact: Karen Barela, AHA, PO Box 1679, Boulder, CO 80306-1679; telephone 303-447-0816, Fax 303-447-2825.

Retirement Planning - It is never too early to begin planning ahead, and there is an easy way to start. Simply request the form "Personal Earnings and Benefit Estimate Statement" Social Security, Department 36, Pueblo, CO 81009.

Organic - The 1992 National Directory of Organic Wholesalers is available for \$29.95 (plus \$5 first-class shipping), Contact: California Action Network (CAN), P.O. Box 464, Davis, CA 95617; telephone 916-756-8518.

Tip - Cut flowers early in the morning or evening when they have the most carbohydrates. Cutting flowers when it's cool also minimizes the amount of air and water they lose. Also, cut them with a sharp knife. The cut should be at a 45-degree angle. Don't use scissors, which can crush their stems.

When - Best time to plant; 10 years ago, or today!

Alert! - Larkspur, like pine needles, locoweed, lupines, and a host of other plants found in western pastures, contains toxins that can poison unwittingly hungry livestock.

What are Herbs?

"There is no universally accepted definition, and herbalists will give a variety of answers to that question. Traditionally, we think of herbs as those plants used for flavor, fragrance, medicine, or dye. Yet, many plants are also considered herbs because of their economic importance, and so a more appropriate definition is that herbs are plants that are of value to people, excluding those plants grown just for ornament. Herbs grow in temperate climates, whereas spices grow in tropical climates.

"There has developed in the last 10 years a tremendous interest in herbs as their uses are discovered and rediscovered. As garden plants they have become much more popular. Herbs are easy to grow but require at least 6 hours of sunlight and well-drained, moderately rich soil to stay beautiful; prune them as needed throughout the growing season.

"Always harvest herbs in the morning before the sun is very bright and cut only the amount you can handle in one day. After bundling, place the herbs in a place that is warm, dark, and well ventilated. Herbs can be successfully preserved by either drying (microwave drying also works), freezing, or making vinegars or oils." (The U.S. Botanic Garden, Public Programs Office, 1990)

Endangered Livestock: Swine

"Swine provide more animal protein for human diets globally than any other animal, except poultry. Yet swine breeds (along with poultry) are the most endangered of all livestock, both in North America and around the world. Some dramatic facts have been turned up by the 1990-91 American Minor Breeds Conservancy (AMBC) Livestock Census:

There is only one North American herd of Gloucester Old Spot pigs, and only three herds of Large Blacks. Both breeds are globally threatened. Two herds of Saddleback swine, a breed thought extinct, were discovered as part of the census research.

- There may be as few as five breeders of traditional Berkshires in the United States and Canada.
- The number of Ossabow Island pigs has increased on the mainland, but the future of the island population is far from secure.
- Red Wattle/Waddle pigs have three registries, but only one would give information to our telephone census inquiry. The response was not encouraging. "Fewer than 50 pigs were registered last year, but fainting goat registrations are doing real good."

The very small number of breeders for several breeds of pigs is even more compelling when received in the context of the information gathered in the AMBC member-funded Extinction Project published in 1991. Of the dozen breeds which have disappeared in the last century, eight were breeds of swine. As the pork industry becomes even more specialized and intensive, the variability between breeds is reduced. This means less diversity within breeds, and less diversity between breeds. (Comments of Donald E. Bixby, DVM, Executive Director, AMBC, November 20, 1991)

Footnote: Inquiry for more information on this topic and the work of AMBC is welcomed. Contact: Donald E. Bixley, DVM, Executive Dir., AMBC, Box 477, Pittsboro, NC 27312; telephone 919-542-5704.

Please Circulate

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April 10-11, 1992 - Accessing Private Lands: Legal Issues, Holiday Inn--Lane Avenue, Columbus, OH. Contact: Thomas Sporleder, The Ohio State University, Agricultural Economics Department, 2120 Fyffe Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1099; telephone 614-292-0315.

April 11-13, 1992 - Natural Products Expo West Trade Show, Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, CA. Contact: Natural Products Expo West, 1301 Spruce Street, Boulder, CO 80302; telephone 303-939-8440.

May 2-3, 1992 - The 19th Annual Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival, Howard County Fairgrounds, West Friendship, MD. Contact: Mary Streaker, 1739 Circle Rd., Towson, MD 21204; telephone 301-823-4037.

May 23, 1992 - Sixth Annual Baltimore Herb Festival, 10 am to 6 pm, Leakin Park (just off the Baltimore Beltway). Contact: Mary Louise Wolf, 2301 Pickwick Rd., Baltimore, MD 21207; telephone 301-448-0406.

June 1-3, 1992 - Energy in Rural America: Profits and Opportunities in Agriculture, Fuels, and Utility Issues, The Embassy Suites Hotel, Des Moines, IA. Contact: Gail Ettinger, Energy in Rural America, 309 Davis Street, Evanston, IL 60201; telephone 708-864-5651.

July 9-12, 1992 - HERBS 92. International Herb Growers and Marketers Association Seventh Annual Conference, Worthington Hotel, Ft. Worth, TX. Contact: Edward Stygar, IHGMA, 1202 Allanson Rd., Mundelein, IL 60060; telephone 708-566-4566.

July 16-18, 1992 - American Emu Association Third Annual Conference and Exhibition, Marriott New Orleans Hotel, New Orleans, LA. Contact: Carter Cook, AEA, 1033 La Posada Drive, Suite 220, Austin, TX 78752-3824; telephone 512-454-0598, Fax 512-454-3036.

July 11-15, 1992 - International Floriculture Industry Short Course Trade Show, Cincinnati Convention Center, Cincinnati, OH. Contact: Lucy Tayama, Ohio Florist's Association, 2130 Stella Court, Suite 200, Columbus, OH 43215; telephone 614-487-1117, Fax 614-487-1216.

August 14-16, 1992 - 18th Annual Summer Conference, Natural Organic Farmers Association, Hampshire College, Amherst, MA. Contact: Julie Rawson, NOFA, RFD2, Sheldon Rd., Barre, MA 01005; telephone 508-355-2853.

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14
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92